



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST.

VOL. IV.

WASHINGTON, D. C., APRIL, 1891.

No. 2.

THE INDIAN MESSIAH.

BY FIRST LIEUT. NAT. P. PHISTER, U. S. A.

The recent development of the Messiah craze, which has so much demoralized the Indians all over the West, has produced a great many articles on the subject ; all of them more or less correct, but none entirely satisfactory, so far as regards the origin and originators of the creed to which the aboriginal inhabitants of our country have given such belief as to bring us to the verge of a great Indian war, after the Indian question had come to be regarded as practically settled.

All of the articles mentioned have pointed, with more or less definiteness, to Nevada as being the region from which this now wide-spread doctrine has been promulgated. The writer, having recently been placed in a position which has offered singular facilities for an investigation of this matter, has gone very fully into the details of it ; has questioned many of the Nevada Indians on the subject, and is now able to give a very correct account of the tenets of the faith.

All testimony on the subject is to the effect that the doctrine was first preached in 1869 by a Piute Indian, who lived in Mason's Valley, about sixty miles south of Virginia City, Nevada, and near the Walker River Indian reservation. This Indian continued his preaching for two or three years, when he died.

Much talk was caused among the Indians by this man's preaching ; but all interest in the matter seems to have ceased from the period of his death until some time in September, 1887, when a new prophet, Kvit-tsów by name, took up the matter ; and there is no doubt that the revival instituted by him has resulted in the present

Indian disturbance, so far, at least, as religion or superstition has anything to do with it.

Kvit-tsów, or Wo-po-káh-tee, as he is sometimes called, lives and preaches at Mason's Valley, the scene of the labors of the first prophet, who was Kvit-tsów's father, and whose name cannot now be ascertained.

The doctrine, as preached by its original exponent in 1869 and now by Kvit-tsów, is substantially as follows :

The Indians of all tribes having lapsed into a state of indifference as to many of their traditional tribal customs and religious ceremonies, which ceremonies consisted largely of certain religious dances and penances, have displeased the Great Spirit, who has therefore allowed them to become destitute, the whites to gain the ascendancy, and the game of all kinds to be destroyed.

This has been the punishment awarded by the Great Spirit to his chosen people (the Indians) for their religious laxation ; but he still loves them and will, upon conditions, restore them to the fullest enjoyment of their former rights, powers, and privileges, and the prophet describes the manner in which the reinstatement is to be made.

The conditions are that the Indians shall return to their old habits and customs as far as practicable ; that they shall resume and continue religious dances with enthusiasm and devotion ; that they shall believe in the power of the Great Spirit to carry out his promises as made by his inspired prophet, and that they shall cast aside the customs of the white men, which are displeasing to the Great Spirit.

When the Indians have manifested their change of heart by their works and by their abandonment of their evil ways, the Great Spirit will come in person and will lift all true believers into the highest mountains ; all unbelievers will be petrified and left behind.

The Great Spirit will then send a mighty flood of mud and water to drown all the white people, and to utterly obliterate from the country all traces of their works and occupancy.

During the flood, and while the faithful are on the mountains, the Great Spirit will heal and make whole all the sick, lame, and blind, and the old will be made young.

Upon the subsidence of the flood the land will be revealed in all its original, primitive beauty ; the buffaloes in countless thousands will return to their former ranges, and game of all kinds will be more abundant than it ever was before the white people came.

Upon the return of the faithful from the mountains they will find that all the dead Indians have returned in the flesh, the white people will have been destroyed and will never return, and thereafter the Indians only will possess and occupy the whole land, undisturbed by any other race.

Kvit-tsów claims that he receives these revelations while in trances, during which he goes to the spirit land and converses freely with the Great Spirit and with the dead Indians.

The prophet preaches his own invulnerability, and says that if soldiers attempt to kill him they will themselves be killed, and that he (Kvit-tsów) will still live, even if cut into small pieces, and that the soldiers will become as if they had no bones and will fall to the ground.

The doctrine as preached by Kvit-tsów is not at all in the nature of a crusade against the white people, as it is promised that the Great Spirit will perform all these things as a reward of faith; but it is easy to see that the doctrine may readily be perverted by "medicine men" to subserve the purposes of priestcraft, and the Indians be made to believe that the Great Spirit wishes some material human assistance in the extermination of the whites, and that the doctrine may be so perverted as to teach that any believer will be invested with the same invulnerability that the prophet claims for himself.

Many of the Piutes believe this doctrine, but their faith has been much shaken by several failures of the Great Spirit to keep the appointments made for him by his prophet; still, the belief is a comforting one, and to be turned to stone is not desirable; so they hardly dare to disbelieve. The time now set for the fulfillment of the prophecy is next May.

In September, 1889, two delegates from each of twelve different tribes were sent by their tribes to hear Kvit-tsów and to carry back reports of his teachings. Some of these delegates were from tribes far to the east; some had traveled for two or three months to reach Mason's Valley; some, probably Arapahoes, conversed by means of the sign language, which few of the Piutes understand, and all of the Northwestern tribes were represented.

One Johnson Sides, a Piute, living near Reno, Nevada, seems to have attained what he considers an unenviable notoriety in connection with this matter, several papers having printed descriptions of him, in which he figures as a claimant to the Messiahship of his

people. Sides is in truth a reasonably sensible and well-informed old coffee-cooler, who claims that Kvit-tsów is crazy, and he, together with Lee Winnemucca, who is a brother of Sarah and a son of the original Winnemucca, loses no opportunity to combat what they consider a most pernicious doctrine.

There is every reason to believe that this whole Messiah craze started at Mason's Valley from the teachings of Kvit-tsów and his predecessor, and that the doctrine has been much perverted and distorted in its transmission to the Sioux, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and other tribes.

Let us hope that the failure of promises will shake their faith as it has shaken that of the Piutes.

SOUL WANDERING.—The Votjaks of northeastern Russia believe in the wide-spread theory that the soul leaves the body when the person sleeps, and travels to different countries. Thus dreams are only the various adventures which happen to the soul during these journeys.

For instance, they tell the story of two Votjaks who went on a journey. Arriving in a forest, one lay down and went to sleep, while the other sat up and smoked. In a few minutes he saw his companion's soul escape from his mouth, saying "good-bye for awhile," rush to a pine tree, and go down the hollow trunk, to come out again soon and re-enter the sleeper's body. The Votjak awoke and told his comrade that he had dreamed of finding money in the hollow of a tree. The smoker did not tell him that he had seen his soul on its travels, but, remaining behind, he climbed the tree and found the money in the place indicated. (J. N. Smirnoff, "Votjaky. Istorico-etnografischesky otscherk," quoted in *L'Anthropologie*, v. 1, No. 5, p. 619, 1890.)

THE LAKE OF BLOOD IN DAHOMEY.—Father Chautard, formerly a missionary in Dahomey, says that the following is the truth about the lake of human blood mentioned by many travellers and said to be large enough to float a canoe:

"In front of the king's palace there are really two holes measuring a cubic meter each. They fill these with blood and float upon it a little boat made of silver." (*Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Lyon*, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 82, 1890.)